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AUTHOR Imel, Susan

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ABSTRACT

Current trends related to older adults have the potential of influencing programs and services in adult, career, and vocational education. The amount and kind of learning in which older adults engage is one trend of interest to educators. A 1997 study reveals that older people are learning in numbers and amounts of time expended at a rate far exceeding expectations. Studies of participation in formal or organized adult education programs reveal that the percentage of older adult participants is modest but expected to grow. A second trend that appears in recent literature is advocacy of age-integrated, instead of age-segregated, programs and policies. Educators should integrate the perspectives of older adults and what is known about their learning styles and preferences into ongoing programming. The plethora of information available over the Internet both about and for older adults is a third trend related to older adults with implications for educators. Many older adults are actively using the Internet as both consumers and producers of information. Information about many aspects of aging can be found on the Internet. The use of the Internet by older adults is consistent with the kind of education in which they tend to engage--informal and noncredit, and educators need to consider how they can use it to support and deliver educational programming for older adults. (An annotated list of 16 print resources and a list of 5 resource organizations are provided.) (YLB)

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A New Look at Older Adults
Trends and Issues Alerts

Susan Imel

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS
ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
by Susan Imel 1997

A New Look at Older Adults

> *The aging society is no longer a prediction; we already live in the first decades of the Age Age.* (Lamdin and Fugate 1997, p. 1)

Since 1900, nearly 30 years have been added to the life expectancy of individuals born in the United States, and, in the past 35 years, the number of individuals age 65 and over has expanded from 8 to 12 percent as a proportion of the total U.S. population (Lamdin and Fugate 1997). A number of factors, such as the eradication of childhood diseases, advances in medical care, and a decline in fertility rates following the postwar baby boom, have converged to create the statistical aging of the population (Manheimer, Snodgrass, and Moskow-McKenzie 1995). Furthermore, the trend of increasing numbers of older adults as a proportion of the total population is expected to continue: by 2030 a total of 20 percent of the United States' population will be age 65 or over (Lamdin and Fugate 1997). Greater numbers of older adults have stimulated discussions about how the graying of America will affect future economic and social conditions, including education. This *Trends and Issues Alerts* reviews some current trends related to older adults that have the potential of influencing programs and services in adult, career, and vocational education.

The amount and kind of learning in which older adults engage is a trend of interest to educators. A study (Lamdin and Fugate 1997) that examined all types of older adult learning "revealed that older people are learning in numbers and amounts of time expended at a rate far exceeding even [the researchers'] expectations" (p. 85). Respondents in this study spent an average of 27.86 hours per month in informal (nonclassroom-based or self-directed) learning, and 17.75 hours per month in formal (classrooms or other organized settings). A review of studies of participation in formal or organized adult education programs revealed that, although the "actual number and percentage of participants [of older adults] is still rather modest," it is expected to grow (Manheimer, Snodgrass, and Moskow-McKenzie, 1995, pp. 15-16). Currently, the largest percentage of individuals age 55 and over is in noncredit, continuing education.

A second trend that appears in the recent literature (e.g., Neugarten 1996; Van Fleet 1995; Williamson 1997) is advocacy of age-integrated, instead of age-segregated programs and policies. Neugarten (ibid.) predicts that "gerontology is not going to last [because] chopping up the life cycle was not a very good idea to begin with" (p. 403). According to this trend, rather than planning separate programs, educators should integrate the perspectives of older adults and what is known about their learning styles and preferences into ongoing programming (Williamson ibid). In age-integrated educational programs, older adults become both learners and teachers, sometimes imparting their existing skills and knowledge and sometimes continuing to engage in learning new things (ibid.).

The plethora of information available over the Internet both about and for older adults is a third trend related to older adults with implications for educators. Many older adults are defying the stereotype that computers are for the young and are actively engaged in using the Internet as both consumers and producers of information (e.g., Dixon 1997; Lawhon, Ennis, and Lawhon 1996). In addition, information about many aspects of aging can be found on the Internet (Post 1997). The use of the Internet by older adults is consistent with the kind of education in which they tend to engage—informal or noncredit—and educators need to consider how they can use it to support and/or deliver educational programming for older adults.

When thinking about serving older adults, some questions for adult, career, and vocational educators that emerge from these trends include the following: What type of learning activities can be developed to address the changing work and family responsibilities of older adults? Is it feasible to link age-integrated programming with existing programs? How can educational institutions support informal, self-directed learning of older adults? What is the role of the Internet in fostering and supporting educational programs for older adults?

Print Resources

Baldi, R. A. "Training Older Adults to Use the Computer: Issues Related to the Workplace, Attitudes, and Training." *Educational Gerontology* 23, no. 5 (July-August 1997): 453-465.
Examines issues related to training older adults in the use of computers and concludes by suggesting characteristics of training programs that facilitate learning of computer skills by older adults.

Beatty, P. T., and Wolf, M. A. *Connecting with Older Adults: Educational Responses and Approaches.* Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1996. (ED 387 704)
Using information from gerontology and adult education as a foundation, this book is designed to help develop programs for older learners. In addition to theoretical information about aging and learning, it contains exercises and vignettes that help the reader analyze and reflect on specific challenges that aging provides to practitioners.

Dixon, J. M. *Predicting Seniors' Use of Cyberspace.* New York: Garland, 1997.
Reports on a study of adults age 55 and over who use SeniorNet. The study was designed to examine whether a needs gratification model could explain participants' social networking behaviors and to explain the frequency of their participation.

Glass, J. C., Jr. "Factors Affecting Learning in Older Adults." *Educational Gerontology* 22, no. 4 (June 1996): 359-372.
Presents conclusions drawn from the literature about the aging of older adults and draws implications of these conclusions for those who plan, design, and conduct educational experiences for older adults.

Kausler, D. H., and Kausler, B. C. *The Graying of America: An Encyclopedia of Aging, Health, Mind, and Behavior.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.
Includes more than 300 entries covering topics about aging. General topics covered include mental functions and how they are affected by aging, physical and mental health in aging, social roles, and organizations and individuals involved in research on aging.

Johnson, J., and Slater, R., eds. *Ageing and Later Life.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1993.
Compiled to accompany an Open University course, this book of readings contains material drawn from across the spectrum of social gerontology. The editors have grouped the selections into the following general categories: personal accounts, images and

identity, ill-health and well-being, intervention and therapy, power and control, concepts and values, policy and politics, pasts, and futures.

Lamdin, L. with Fugate, M. *Elderlearning: New Frontier in an Aging Society.* Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1997.
Results of a survey on learning undertaken by older adults form the basis for this book. Included are types of learning efforts (e.g., formal, informal, and self-directed learning) as well as a profile of the learners who engage in these activities. The book concludes with an action agenda based on major points raised throughout.

Lawhon, T.; Ennis, D.; and Lawhon, D. C. "Senior Adults and Computers in the 1990s." *Educational Gerontology* 22, no. 2 (March 1996): 193-201.
Explains how older adults can use computers to improve their productivity, entertain themselves, and enhance education and daily functions.

Manheimer, R. J.; Snodgrass, D. D.; and Moskow-McKenzie, D. *Older Adult Education: A Guide to Research, Programs, and Policies.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995. (ED 388 800)
Published in conjunction with the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement, this book profiles older people engaged in various forms of organized learning. Emphasis is placed on the history of older adult education, related research, and policy development.

Neugarten, B. L. *The Meanings of Age: Selected Papers of Bernice L. Neugarten.* Edited and with a foreword by D. A. Neugarten. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
This book brings together 34 of Bernice Neugarten's writings in the field of adult development and aging. The papers are grouped into the following four sections: age as a dimension of social organization, the life course, personality and adaptation, and social policy issues.

Post, J. A. "Internet Resources on Aging: Increasing Options and Human Factors." *Gerontologist* 37, no. 1 (February 1997): 125-129.
Following a discussion of their growth, the author places Internet resources on aging into the total picture of all information resources on aging. She also debunks some myths about the Internet. Web addresses are provided for resources discussed.

Scharlach, A. W., and Kaye, L. W., eds. *Controversial Issues in Aging.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1997.
Debates that address 20 controversial issues arising from the changing context of aging in the United States are represented in this book. Each debate includes position statements arguing for and against the given proposition, and rebuttals to those position statements. The book is divided into six sections: policy and program issues, age-based politics, health and quality-of-life issues, family issues, the field of gerontology, and aging in the future.

Thornton, J. E., and Harold, S. A., eds. *Education in the Third Age: Canadian and Japanese Perspectives.* Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press, University of British Columbia, 1992.
The papers presented in this book explore two principal themes—education in the Third Age and education for the Third Age—by focusing on one or more of the following broad topics: lifelong learning and education for success and productive aging; educational opportunities for promoting greater intergenerational understanding; retraining an aging labor force for alternate careers and preparation for retirement; revised linear life plans blending education, work, and leisure across the life course; and educational and social policy for developing new and equitable relationships among individuals, governments, and social and business organizations.

Van Fleet, C. *Public Libraries, Lifelong Learning, and Older Adults: Background and Recommendations.* Washington, DC: National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, 1995. (ED 385 259)
Provides an overview of the public library's role in lifelong learning, and recommends that to provide effective service to older adults, librarians should have a three-tiered knowledge base that includes knowledge for specialized service to older adults. Because aging and development take place throughout the lifespan, the author advocates for a holistic, multidisciplinary, continuous approach to lifelong learning that is inclusive and interrelated with all segments of the community.

Williamson, A. "'You're Never Too Old to Learn!' : Third-Age Perspectives on Lifelong Learning." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 16, no. 3 (May-June 1997): 173-184.
Proposes change in educational thinking about ways to meet the current and future social, demographic, economic, and technological changes by bringing Third-Age perspectives to bear on lifelong learning. Argues for age-integrated rather than age-segregated educational programs.

Wolf, M. A. *Older Adults: Learning in the Third Age. Information Series No. 358.* Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1994. (ED 375 324)
This review paper examines and synthesizes literature about persons over 60, particularly as they engage in learning. The literature of psychology, sociology, gerontology, education, and other fields is reviewed and connected into the following four constructs: the inner life, cognitive changes of aging, psychosocial development, and socioeconmic factors. An appendix includes print and organizational resources for program planning.

Resource Organizations

Age of Reason (website only): www.ageofreason.com

American Association of Retired Persons, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049 (800/424-3410; www.aarp.org/ and www.aarp.org/cyber/guide1.htm).

Administration on Aging, National Aging Information Center, 330 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 4656, Washington, DC 20201 (202/619-7501; fax (202/401-7620; TTY (202/401-7575; www.ageinfo.org/).
Other AOA web sites include—
Directory of Web and Gopher Sites on Aging: www.aoa.dhhs.gov/aoa/webres/craig.htm. Internet and E-Mail Resources on Aging: www.aoa.dhhs.gov/aoa/pages/jpostlst.html

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090 (614/292-4353 or 800/848-4815, ext. 4-7685; www.coe.ohio-state.edu/cete/ericacve/index.htm).

SeniorNet, 1 Kearny Street, 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94108 (415/352-1210; www.Seniornet.org/).

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CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210